

Background

In September 2008 SNC staff was contacted about exploring options to partner with the National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations (NGSCSD) and other partners to initiate a Geotourism MapGuide project for the Sierra Nevada Region. Geotourism is defined as *"Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographic character of a place, its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Geotourism encompasses a range of niches including adventure and nature-based travel, eco- and agri-tourism, cultural and heritage travel."* Sierra residents and visitors, community organizations, tourism stakeholders and local businesses will nominate sites for potential inclusion in a print MapGuide and interactive Web site. Unlike any other mapping project, a favorite local restaurant, farm, winery, hiking or biking trail, swimming hole, museum or artist gallery are samples of the type of nominations National Geographic and its project partners will be seeking. The Web site will target a variety of growing travel niches—adventure and nature tourism, cultural heritage travel and agritourism—and allow for residents to select the one-of-a-kind places integral to a distinctive character of place. The NGSCSD has successfully completed several of these guides in different regions around the world.

The project was initially discussed with the Board at its December 2008 meeting and a status report on the project was delivered at its March 2009 meeting. SNC support for this project helps to achieve SNC program goals to increase tourism and recreation opportunities and supports enhancement of economic opportunities for the Region. It also supports goals in the SNC Education and Communication Plan to strengthen a Regional identity for the Sierra Nevada. The Sierra Business Council, whose mission is also closely aligned with goals of the project, has provided strong leadership to manage and coordinate the project throughout the Region.

Staff has participated in several meetings to convene a core team of proponents for the Geotourism MapGuide effort. As of this meeting implementing partners include the SNC, the NGSCSD, the Sierra Business Council (SBC), with strong support from The National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service, California State Parks, and all partners involved in the Yosemite Gateway Communities Working Group.

In August, the SNC, SBC, NGSCSD and Yosemite Gateway Partners hosted a project kick-off media event in Mariposa to announce the official opening of the Web site and commemorate the launch of the Sierra Nevada Geotourism MapGuide Project. Geotourism Site nominations are now being submitted from the entire Region with an initial focus on the Yosemite Gateway Communities. The site can be viewed at www.sierranevadageotourism.org.

A similar local effort being conducted in El Dorado County is also collecting site nominations, which will be incorporated into the Sierra Nevada Project.

Current Status

Project partners continue to raise funds and meet with organizations and individuals in other regions of the Sierra to coordinate future phases of the project. A very aggressive schedule has been developed to involve the entire Sierra Nevada Region in the site nomination process within one year. Partners are also coordinating a statewide media push to reach metropolitan areas and increase outside awareness of the project.

Next Steps

Next steps involve more fundraising for the project, development and coordination of the geo-council (representatives from the entire Region designated to agree on site publication thresholds for the Web site and future printed maps), and organizing approximately 50 community meetings throughout the Region to educate partners and solicit site nominations.

Recommendation

There is no recommendation at this time, although staff strongly encourages the Board to view the website www.sierranevadageotourism.org and participate by nominating your favorite places in the Sierra Nevada.